# Ancient Civilizations

*Ancient Civilizations* offers a comprehensive and straightforward account of the world's first civilizations and how they were discovered, drawing on many avenues of inquiry including archaeological excavations, surveys, laboratory work, highly specialized scientific investigations, and both historical and ethnohistorical records.

This book covers the earliest civilizations in Eurasia and the Americas, from Egypt and the Sumerians to the Indus Valley, Shang China, and the Maya. It also addresses subsequent developments in Southwest Asia, moving on to the first Aegean civilizations, Greece and Rome, the first states of sub-Saharan Africa, divine kings and empires in East and Southeast Asia, and the Aztec and Inka empires of Mesoamerica and the Andes. It includes a number of features to support student learning: a wealth of images, including several new illustrations; feature boxes which expand on key sites, finds, and written sources; and an extensive guide to further reading. With new perceptions of the origin and collapse of states, including a review of the issue of sustainability, this fifth edition has been extensively updated in the light of spectacular new discoveries and the latest theoretical advances.

Examining the world's pre-industrial civilizations from a multidisciplinary perspective and offering a comparative analysis of the field which explores the connections between all civilizations around the world, this volume provides a unique introduction to pre-industrial civilizations in all their brilliant diversity. It will prove invaluable to students of Archaeology.

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*Fifth Edition*

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# PREFACE

*Three thousand, four thousand years maybe, have passed and gone since human feet last trod the floor on which you stand, and yet, as you note the recent signs of life around you—the half-filled bowl of mortar for the door, the darkened lamp, the finger mark on the freshly painted surface, the farewell garland dropped on the threshold. . . . Time is annihilated by little intimate details such as these, and you feel an intruder.*

—Egyptologist Howard Carter, notebook entry on Tutankhamun's tomb, November 26, 1922.

Ancient civilizations tempt romantic visions of the past: golden pharaohs, great cities and temple mounds, lost palaces mantled in swirling mists. The discovery of the Assyrians, Homeric Troy, and the abandoned Maya cities of Central America was one of the nineteenth-century's great adventure stories. Nineteenth-century archaeologists like Englishman Austen Henry Layard, who excavated biblical Nineveh, and New Yorker John Lloyd Stephens, who revealed the ancient Maya to an astonished world, became celebrities and best-selling authors. They and other early excavators are the prototypes of the swashbuckling Indiana Jones of late twentieth-century movie fame. The romance continued into the 1920s, culminating in Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon's dramatic discovery of the undisturbed tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamun and Sir Leonard Woolley's spectacular excavation of the Royal Tombs at Ur in Iraq. Even today, the occasional spectacular find, like the terracotta regiment of the first Chinese emperor Qin Shihuangdi or the Lords of Sipán in coastal Peru, reminds us that archaeology can be a profoundly exciting endeavor.

The nineteenth century was the century of archaeological adventure. The twentieth century saw archaeology turn from a casual pursuit into a complex, highly specialized academic discipline. *Ancient Civilizations* describes what we know about the world's early civilizations today, 175 years after John Lloyd Stephens and artist Frederick Catherwood stumbled through the ruins of Maya Copán and Paul-Emile Botta and Austen Henry Layard electrified London and Paris with spectacular bas-reliefs from Assyrian palaces. This book is about science and multidisciplinary research, not about adventure and romance, an attempt to summarize state-of-the-art knowledge about preindustrial civilizations in every corner of the world. We draw on many avenues of inquiry: on archaeological excavations, surveys, and laboratory work; on highly specialized scientific investigations into such topics as the sources of volcanic glass and metals; and on both historical and ethnohistorical records. In the final analysis, this book is a synthesis of science and ancient voices, for in many cases the latter add telling detail to a story reconstructed from purely material remains.

*Ancient Civilizations* is divided into six parts that lead logically from one to the other. Part I gives essential background, some key definitions, and historical information. It also describes some of the major theories concerning the development of civilizations, one of the key controversies of archaeology for more than a century. Part II focuses on the very first civilizations: Mesopotamia,

Egypt, the Indus Valley, and the earliest Chinese states. Parts III and IV build on earlier foundations and trace later civilizations in Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean. This book is unique in that it goes on to describe classical Greek and Roman civilizations, whose roots lie much deeper in the past than many authorities would have one believe. Part V links the Mediterranean and Asian worlds with the discovery of the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean about 2,000 years ago. Finally, the last four chapters, Part VI, describe the remarkable states of Mesoamerica and the Andean region of the Americas. An epilogue rounds off the narrative.

This book provides the reader with a straightforward narrative account of the ancient civilizations from their first appearance in Southwest Asia some 5,000 years ago to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru in the early sixteenth century A.D. As such, it is written from a global perspective and without forcing it into a particular theoretical framework—this results both from the variability in the ancient societies themselves and from the diversity of the ways that they have been researched in recent decades. Chapter 2 summarizes major theoretical viewpoints and makes the point that the development of state-organized societies was a complex, multifaceted process, which took hold in many parts of the world. It also stresses that there were no overall principles or rules that governed this process. Rather, each civilization is a reflection of local conditions and of the distinctive worldview that shaped its institutions. Divine kingship is characteristic of Egyptian civilization, the Khmer, the Maya, and the Inka. But that does not mean that divine monarchy originated in one place and spread to all parts of the world thereafter. If there is a theoretical bias to this book, it is that each early civilization was a unique society, an attempt by human beings (as individuals and groups) who subsisted in very different environments to deal with problems of growing populations, increasingly crowded living conditions, and ever-greater economic, political, and social complexity. We know that each instructor will use this book in a different way, each bringing his or her theoretical emphases to the narrative in these pages, so this approach seems appropriate.

We provide a Guide to Further Reading at the end of the book rather than a comprehensive bibliography because the individual literatures for each area are so extensive and complex. The works cited in the chapter-by-chapter Guide to Further Reading will give readers access to the more specialized literature through widely quoted standard works and some guidance through a myriad of specialized monographs and periodical articles.

Inevitably, a book of this nature is a compromise, both in geographical coverage and in topics selected for more detailed discussion. We are also limited in our ability to illustrate the complex archaeological record of these societies. For example, our coverage of many aspects of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization is inevitably sketchy, especially in the areas of religion, philosophical beliefs, and literature. The Guide to Further Reading refers the reader to works that cover these subjects in detail. Our primary concerns are to achieve balanced geographical coverage and to place the world's ancient civilizations in as broad an archaeological and historical context as possible. We believe that one can understand these societies only by seeking their roots deep in the past, by reconstructing their local environments, and by placing them in both an indigenous and a broader perspective. We hope that we have succeeded in this.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIFTH EDITION

The fifth edition of *Ancient Civilizations* has been revised throughout to reflect the latest advances in the field, and it includes suggestions from both instructors and students who have taken the trouble to contact us after reading previous editions. There is fresh coverage throughout the book, specifically of new discoveries and the latest theoretical advances. For this edition we are especially pleased to welcome Charles Golden, expert on the early civilizations of the Americas, as the third member of our team.

### Updating and Rewriting

- East Asia: Chapter 6 has been substantially revised to include the wealth of new research that is becoming available on the development of early civilization in China.
- Africa: A new chapter has been added (Chapter 13) to cover the early states and civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa, including Great Zimbabwe, Ife, and Benin.
- Mesoamerica and the Andes: Chapters 16 through 19 have been extensively revised and expanded to accommodate the results of the latest fieldwork and research.
- Revision and updating throughout: The entire text and the Guide to Further Reading have been revised and updated on a page-by-page basis.

### Feature Boxes

Three types of in-text feature boxes—designed to amplify the narrative—enhance the book:

- Discoveries: These feature boxes describe important finds that changed our perceptions of early civilizations.
- Sites: These feature boxes discuss sites of unusual interest and significance.
- Voices: These feature boxes refer to writings of ancient times, giving a unique "voice" to the text.

### New and Revised Art Program

The fifth edition's art program has been expanded with new photographs and new or revised line art. These illustrations provide additional background on recent discoveries, amplify the narrative, or replace older images with new images. Some expanded captions serve to integrate the illustrations more closely into the text.

### Complete Redesign

The entire book has been completely redesigned to make it more user-friendly.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book results from years of experience, from fieldwork, from academic conferences, from visiting many of the sites we describe, and from hours of discussion with fellow archaeologists. It is impossible to name all of these colleagues but we hope that they will take this collective acknowledgment as an inadequate reflection of our sincere gratitude for their advice and intellectual insights.

A number of scholars reviewed the manuscript while it was in preparation. For the fifth edition we are grateful to the Rob Witcher, Catherine Draycott, and Ann Brysbaert for reviewing the Mediterranean chapters, and to Ken'ichi Sasaki for advice on Japan. We are also deeply grateful to the Routledge production team, and to Rebecca Dunn and her colleagues at codeMantra, who made the process of turning a complex manuscript into a published book such a pleasure.

*Chris Scarre*
*Brian M. Fagan*
*Charles Golden*

# PART I

# Background

*Between them Sennacherib and his hosts had gone forth in all their might and glory to the conquest of distant lands, and had returned rich with spoil and captives, amongst whom may have been the handmaidens and wealth of Israel. . . . Through them, too, the Assyrian monarch had entered his capital in shame, after his last and fatal defeat.*

—Austen Henry Layard (1853, 212) on the human-headed bulls that guarded Assyrian King Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

# 1

# The Study of Civilization

FIGURE 1.0 Assyrian King Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) hunting lions, a scene depicted in this relief carved panel from his palace at Nineveh in Iraq. DEA/G. Dagli Orti/De Agostini/Getty Images.

*The chariot rattles over the plains as the driver clutches the reins, steadying the horses so the king can take better aim. Bowstring pulled taut, Assurbanipal, supreme ruler of the mighty Assyrian empire, stands ready to fire a volley of arrows against the fleeing lions. Already he has had good sport in the royal park, killing or wounding several of them in a show of kingly skill. Suddenly king and driver hear a roar behind them. An injured lion breaks cover and charges the chariot, seeking to kill its tormentors, but the royal attendants are too quick. Stationed on the back of the chariot for just such an emergency, they thrust their long-handled spears into the lion's chest. The great beast falls dead in the dust. . ..*

## CHAPTER OUTLINE



The modern visitor can see the scene of King Assurbanipal's lion hunt, carved in stone, in the Assyrian gallery of the British Museum. It is one of the many monuments of "civilization" that fill great museums in Europe and North America, be it the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan in New York. Wander into adjacent galleries and you will find mummiform coffins from ancient Egypt and intricate bronze ritual vessels from early China. Just around the corner will be red-figured vases from classical Athens or marble busts of Roman emperors. Many enthusiastic and intrepid tourists venture further afield and visit the places from which these priceless relics originated. They wonder at the sheer size of the pyramids in Egypt or at the desolation that now surrounds many of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia. Sailing the Aegean, they trace the routes taken by ancient Greek mariners 2,500 years ago. In the south of Mexico, Maya ballcourts inspire visitors to ponder how the rules of game worked, and which players may have been sacrificed at the end of play. They hike the Inka trail of Peru, emerging through ancient gates to take in the spectacular views offered by Machu Picchu.

All these are remains of what today we call "ancient civilizations" (see Figure 1.1; Table 1.1), and their study has attracted scholars and laypeople for centuries. *Ancient Civilizations* describes these extraordinary early societies, using archaeological evidence and historical records, oral traditions, and scientific evidence from many academic disciplines. Thus, our story comes not only from modern science but from the voices of those who created the early civilizations as well.

The societies we will describe span 5,000 years and cover most regions of the world: from the first cities of the ancient Mesopotamia, around 3500 B.C.; through Egypt and China, classical Greece and Rome; to the New World civilizations of the Maya and Olmec; ending with the Aztec and Inka empires, which were flourishing at the time of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century A.D.

FIGURE 1.1 The distribution of early preindustrial civilizations.

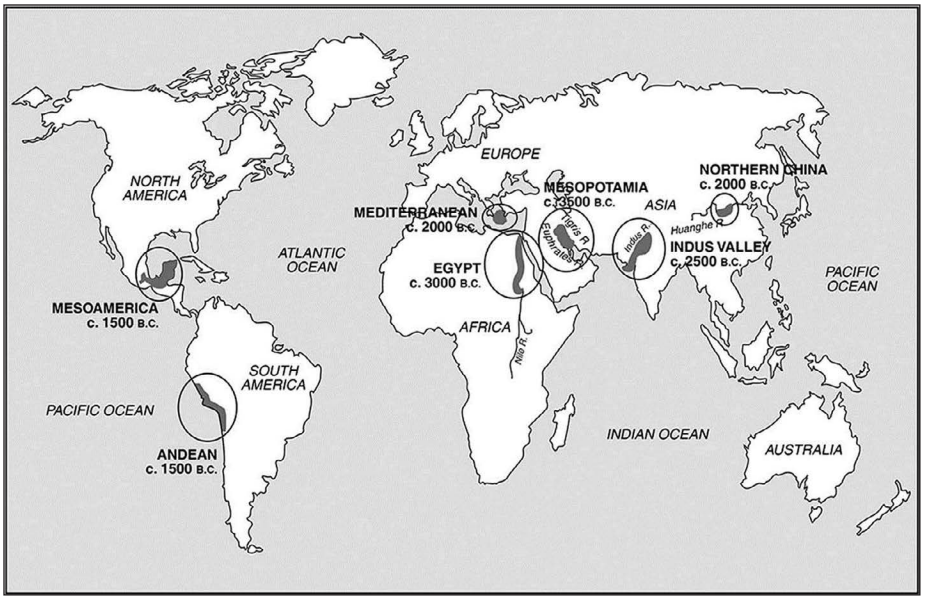
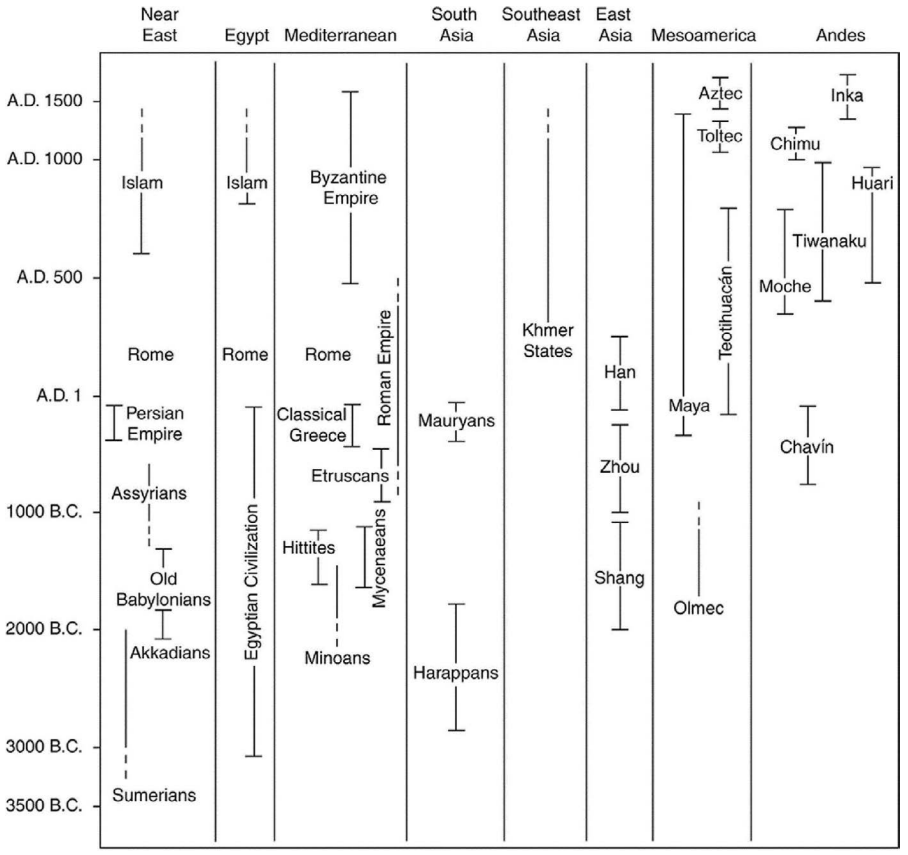



TABLE 1.1 Chronological table of the world's earliest civilizations.



## WHAT IS A "CIVILIZATION"?

The proper definition of civilization has occupied the minds of archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians for generations. An enormous scholarly literature surrounds this complex subject, but for the purposes of this volume we must content ourselves with a simple, if possible all-embracing, working definition that covers a great multitude of complex, early civilizations.

According to that ultimate arbiter of the English language, the *Oxford English Dictionary,* "to civilize" is "to bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten and refine." The notion that "civilization" is a condition superior to "barbarism" underlay nineteenth-century doctrines of racial superiority of more than a century ago and lives on today in the popular understanding of the word. It is perhaps only natural to admire the grandiose monuments, the powerful artworks, and the evocative literature left by the ancient Romans or Egyptians. These give us a vivid picture of complex societies, in some senses comparable to our own. But they are not "better" than earlier or contemporary societies that were less complex. Such a value-laden contrast has no place in archaeology. Archaeologists do not regard civilizations as better than hunter-gatherer societies or those of small-scale farmers. Instead, they are all understood to be only different facets of the rich panoply of human social organization.

Politically minded commentators might well draw a very different conclusion: that the ancient civilizations, with their privileged elites, centralized governments, and crowded, insanitary cities were worse places to live for the ordinary peasants or the urban populace. There is certainly ample evidence of the cruelty that so-called civilized societies could inflict on their enemies and their own subjects, through warfare, slavery, coercion, and punishment. Even in classical Athens, home of the philosophers Socrates and Plato, and the very hearth of democracy, there were probably as many slaves condemned to working the lead and silver mines as there were male Athenian citizens who were qualified to vote. Many of the famed Greek artworks we so much admire today were produced for an elite and seen by only a privileged few. Yet the cultural and scientific achievements of the early civilizations are undeniable, and while we may temper our admiration, we must not underestimate their significance to world history.

A hundred years ago, the climate of scholarly opinion was very different. Nineteenth-century archaeologists and anthropologists were heavily influenced by theories of biological and social evolution developed by the biologist Charles Darwin and the social scientist Herbert Spencer. In his *Origin of Species,* published in 1859, Darwin had shown that in the natural world, it was only the fittest plants and animals that survived and that "natural selection" was the guiding force in making others extinct. Early social scientists such as Spencer attempted to apply the same reasoning to human societies. They saw colonial powers conquering and transforming (for the better, in their minds) societies throughout the world, and they considered this to be proof that European civilizations were in an evolutionary sense "superior." This thinking and the achievements of nineteenth-century archaeologists were summarized in a guidebook to the archaeology exhibits at the Paris Exposition of 1867, which proposed that there existed "laws" of human progress and similar human development.

English anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor was one of the fathers of nineteenth-century anthropology and a fervent believer in human progress. He surveyed human development in all of its forms, from the Paleolithic flint axes found in France, to Maya temples in Central America, and finally to Victorian civilization. Tylor reemphasized a three-level sequence of human development popular with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholars: from simple hunting "savagery" through a stage of simple farming to "barbarism," and then to "civilization," the most complex of human conditions. Tylor's contemporary, American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan went even further. In his *Ancient Society* (1877) he proposed no fewer than seven distinct periods of human progress, starting with simple savagery and culminating in a "state of civilization."

Such doctrines of unilinear (single-line) cultural evolution remained popular well into the twentieth century. In the 1930s and 1940s, Australian-born archaeologist Gordon Childe refined this general approach. In *What Happened in History* (1942), he equated "savagery" with the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic, "barbarism" with the farmers of the Neolithic and Copper Age, and "civilization" with the Bronze Age communities of Mesopotamia and the Levant. As "barbarism" was superior to "savagery," so was "civilization" to "barbarism." Childe believed that progression from one condition to the next needed little explanation, only the opportunity to be presented for societies to make the change. These emotive terms are no longer acceptable in modern archaeological thinking.

Today, archaeologists use the term *civilization* as a shorthand for urbanized, state-level societies. These are sometimes called "preindustrial civilizations" because they relied on manual labor rather than fossil fuels such as coal. Not everybody accepts the definition in such simple terms. Some scholars have even drawn up long lists of features that they feel societies must possess to qualify as civilizations. Such lists often include writing and metallurgy. The limitations of this approach are obvious. For example, the Inka societies of the Andes did not use writing *per se*, yet they had centralized government, substantial cities, an ordered and hierarchical society, specialized craft skills, metallurgy, and an elaborate network of roads and rest houses, as well as a record-keeping system involving knotted strings. Few would deny them the status of a civilization.

How, then, do archaeologists recognize and define a civilization? This is a difficult area of discussion. We have already referred to two of the primary characteristics: urbanization (the presence of cities) and the state (a centralized political unit). These features, in turn, need to be defined:

- A city is a large and relatively dense settlement, with a population numbered in at least the thousands. Small cities of the ancient world had 2,000 or 3,000 inhabitants; the largest, such as Rome or Changan (China), may have had over a million.
- Cities are also characterized by specialization and by interdependence between the city and its rural hinterland and between specialist craftspeople and other groups within the city. The city is what is termed a "central place" in its region, providing services for the villages of the surrounding area while at the same time depending on those villages for food. Most cities, for example, would have had a marketplace where agricultural produce could be exchanged.

- Cities also have a degree of organizational complexity well beyond that of small farming communities. There are centralized institutions to regulate internal affairs and ensure security. These usually find expression in monumental architecture such as temples or palaces or sometimes a city wall. Here we must recognize an overlap between the concept of the city and the concept of the state. States, too, are characterized by centralized institutions. It may be possible to have states without cities; but it is hard to envisage a city that is not embedded within a state.

An ancient city site will usually be obvious to archaeologists, both from its size and from the scale of its remains. The state is more difficult to define. It is essentially a political unit, governed by a central authority whose power crosscuts bonds of kinship. Kin groups do not disappear, of course, but their power is reduced, and a new axis of control emerges that is based on allegiance to a ruling elite, including officials who may constitute a bureaucracy.

Cities and states are not the only factors that have been cited in historical attempts to define civilization. One of the most famous attempts was made by Gordon Childe, whom we have already mentioned. In 1950, he drew up a list of ten traits that he considered to be the common characteristics of early civilizations throughout the world. In the 1970s, archaeologist Charles Redman divided Childe's list into "primary" and "secondary." The primary characteristics include cities and states, together with full-time specialization of labor, concentration of surplus, and a class-structured society. The five secondary characteristics are symptoms or by-products of these major economic and organizational changes: monumental public works, long-distance trade, standardized monumental artworks, writing, and the sciences (arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy). Nonetheless, we have already noted the shortcomings of such lists of shared traits, and not all civilizations possess all of Childe's ten traits. While they may be useful to think with, such lists can never be considered an adequate "definition" of a civilization.

This is a book about preindustrial civilizations drawn on a very wide canvas. Many surveys of early civilization confine themselves to the first states and to the controversies surrounding the origins of civilization, one of the great issues in archaeology. We have chosen instead to describe early civilizations on a global basis and their development over long periods of time. For instance, in Southwest Asia, we cover not only the first city-states but also the empires of Assyria and Babylon. In the Mediterranean region, where many surveys of early civilization stop with the fall of Late Bronze Age Mycenae in about 1200 B.C., we have included chapters on the Greeks, Carthaginians, Etruscans, and Romans. In East Asia, coverage of the earliest Chinese civilization, that of the Shang, is followed through in a later chapter on the Han empire, where the emergence of states in Korea and Japan is also outlined. In Africa, we deal not only with Egypt, Meroe, and Aksum but also with the later kingdoms of Benin and Great Zimbabwe. Similarly, in the Americas, we cover the entire 3,500-year trajectory of state-organized societies in Central and South America.

## COMPARING CIVILIZATIONS

The world's early civilizations developed along many different lines while at the same time sharing some fundamental core features, such as complex political hierarchies, that define them as civilizations. Although the specifics of

urban spaces differ, cities are characteristic of both Sumerian and Aztec civilizations on different sides of the world. While details of construction and function vary wildly, the Egyptians buried their monarchs under pyramids, as did the Maya. Social inequality is common to all early civilizations, as is a strongly centralized government headed by a minority who controlled all valuable resources and the loyalty and labor of thousands of commoners. Force, or the threat of force, was all-important as a means of coercing rivals and rebellious citizens. The Egyptians, the Khmer of Cambodia, and the Inka of Peru all had forms of divine kingship, but vary in many other respects. Comparison is helpful at a different level, however, one that does not seek to establish grand theories but merely to describe or review similarities and differences. This was the approach taken by Canadian archaeologist Bruce Trigger, who compared seven early civilizations in such features as population density, technology, religious beliefs and practices, legal systems, and family and community organization.

Trigger emphasized an important distinction between civilizations based on city-states (such as those of Mesopotamia, the Maya, or Greece) and those (such as Egypt, the Inka, and Shang China) that were unitary or territorial states. He postulated that in city-states the city's populace made up the whole spectrum of society, with craftspeople, farmers, and the elite. The cities themselves were hubs of commercial activity, with flourishing markets. By contrast, in territorial states the earliest cities were principally political centers. Farmers lived in the rural hinterland in small settlements secure without walls (since territorial states were less afflicted by internecine strife). Trigger argued that in territorial states the interaction between rural farmers and urban centers was largely in the form of taxes paid by the farmers to the city-based bureaucracies. The farmers were less reliant on urban craftspeople and markets than they were in city-state societies.

The nature of the early cities themselves was very variable. Some were dense concentrations of population, bounded by a city wall for defense. Others were ceremonial and administrative centers, surrounded by more diffuse populations that supported the needs of the elites and those resident in the urban core. This "low density urbanism" was a feature of civilizations in tropical latitudes such as the Maya, or the Khmer whose vast complex at Angkor spread over many square kilometers. Even in walled cities, however, we should not imagine that the whole of the space was taken up by buildings: An early description of the Mesopotamian city of Uruk states that one-third of the walled area was occupied by gardens.

Contrasts and parallels such as those proposed by Trigger are thought-provoking and provide valuable new insights. They do not explain everything. They do, however, invite us to address general questions and to consider why human societies in very different contexts in widely separated parts of the world chose to adopt such strikingly similar solutions, a point we return to shortly.

## CIVILIZATIONS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

One fundamental feature shared by every civilization is a relatively dense concentration of people. This is the basis of both city-dwelling and state formation. Small bands of hunter-gatherers or subsistence farmers do not build

cities, nor do they create territorial states. It is large concentrations of people that make these achievements possible or perhaps even make them necessary. Small-scale societies manage to survive quite successfully without the burdensome economic and political organization necessary to support and regulate city life. There is no set threshold for populations. Population density is quantitative, measurable in people per square kilometer or square mile. But the impact of such population density, and the transformation of societies that can result in the emergence of political complexity, is relative, and represents a complicated mix of cultural practices, local ecologies and climate, and technologies, among other variables. Once several hundred people are living in a single settlement—whether we would call it a large village or a small city—it becomes essential to have some centralized authority to give direction to the community and resolve disputes. Gradually, as a result of this process, these large populations become qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from other societies around them. It is not just that there are more people crowded into a small space (be it a single city or a limited area of fertile farmland). Rather, they begin to organize themselves differently, to have distinct ideologies and social institutions. It is these innovations that identify them as civilizations.

It was organizing this rich human resource of dense populations that made possible the pyramids of Egypt and the Shang tombs at Anyang. But large populations also had a major impact on surrounding areas. Early civilizations were not hermetically sealed units. They generated a new level of need for raw materials, and those that were not found within their own territories had to be imported from abroad. Consider Mesopotamia as a typical example. The famous early cities of Ur, Uruk, and Babylon were in the south of the country, a fertile plain fed with water by the twin rivers Tigris and Euphrates. This was a land rich in crops and clay but hardly the place to find hard stone for tools, still less the copper, tin, and gold that were increasingly in demand by urban elites. To obtain these raw materials, Mesopotamian traders had to travel far afield, to the Zagros Mountains, the Taurus range of southern Turkey, across the Iranian plateau, or by ship to Oman or India. Here they came into contact with communities at a very different level of social organization. They traded Mesopotamian products in exchange for raw materials, winning the favor of local leaders by gifts of textiles and other products of foreign craftsmanship.

Such contacts were not always peaceful. The enormous human resources and centralized organization of early civilizations made it possible for them to dispense with the protocols of commerce and simply to raid, invade, or annex neighboring areas and appropriate their valuables. Mesopotamian records contain frequent references to military campaigns against troublesome mountain tribes. The converse was also true. Mountain tribes and desert nomads found rich pickings on settled lands. One object of state-organized military campaigns therefore was to dissuade people on the fringes from attacking the cities of the plain. More important, though, was the appropriation of timber, metal, and valuables or the extortion of other tribute. This dispensed with the requirement for the "civilized" to give anything—other than the threat of violence—in exchange for what they took.

Thus, being a close neighbor to an early state was often an uncomfortable experience. By means such as these the impact of early civilizations spread far

beyond the confines of the states themselves. The peoples with whom they came into contact could hardly have remained unaffected by their presence. We may imagine that local peoples were both impressed and mystified by the traders, with their exotic trade goods and stories of faraway places—still more so when a sizable army arrived on their doorstep, equipped with bronze weapons and armor, and led by a king dressed in priceless regalia, the likes of which they had never seen before. The prestige of civilizations among neighboring peoples should not be underestimated. It held true not only in early Mesopotamia, Shang China, or in the case of the Maya and Teotihuacán in Mesoamerica[1] but also in relations between Greeks and Romans and the "barbarian" peoples beyond their frontiers.

## "PRIMARY" AND "SECONDARY" CIVILIZATIONS

We have discussed relations between civilizations and less-complex societies. What about contacts between the civilizations themselves? That such contacts existed is shown both by finds of traded items and by documentary evidence. Distinctive Mesopotamian cylinder seals, for example, turn up in the Indus Valley and tie in with the boast of King Sargon of Akkad (a Mesopotamian ruler) that Indus ships docked at his capital.

The vexing question is whether contacts from one civilization actually instigated or propelled the rise of another. This is where the terms *primary* (or *pristine)* and *secondary* come in. Primary is usually reserved for those civilizations that are thought to have come into being independently. They are sometimes called simply the "first civilizations." The list includes Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Indus Valley, Shang China, the Olmec of Mesoamerica, and the early civilizations of Peru. In none of these cases is stimulus from another center of civilization thought to have played a decisive role. The secondary civilizations are those of later date: notably the Minoans and Mycenaeans in the Aegean, the Aztec of Mexico, or the early civilizations of Nubia and Southeast Asia. In those cases it is held that influences from long-established civilizations had a crucial formative impact.

Many archaeologists (including us) would now question the usefulness of this division. Evidence of contact between civilizations is neither surprising nor rare. As we have seen, the need for raw materials and the prestige and power of these societies of unprecedented scale sent ripples far afield. They provided new sets of ideas about how to organize life and held out for all to see the wealth that might be available to elites in this new and complex type of society. But availability does not lead immediately or inevitably to adoption. One of the most striking features of the early civilizations we describe in these pages is their individuality and distinctiveness. So, contact between civilizations, yes, but no simple connection between the rise of one and the birth of another.

The once popular idea, still sometimes proposed, that the early civilizations of the world share some common point of origin may easily be disproved by considering the global pattern. Contacts between Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, and the Aegean are clearly documented and come as no surprise. It does not lead us to regard any of them as simply an imitation of the others. Shang China, too, may have had some links with western Asia; at any rate the war chariots found in Shang graves at Anyang came

from western Asia and must have reached China via the steppes of central Asia. But no archaeologist today would suggest that Shang civilization owes its origin to Western contact.

The case for independent development of civilizations becomes fully incontrovertible when we turn to the Americas. American civilizations were, to a greater or lesser extent, in contact with one another: trade routes bound the Ancestral Pueblos and Mesoamerican civilizations, maize agriculture spread out from Mexico across two continents, and metallurgy moved north from coastal South America to Mesoamerica. Yet there is no evidence for significant contact between indigenous American and Eurasian civilizations until the arrival of the Norse in Newfoundland in the late tenth century A.D. and Spanish conquistadors in Mexico five centuries later. Nonetheless, both Old World and New World civilizations share such features as agriculture, writing, metallurgy, urbanism, and state-level organization. The appearance of these parallel innovations in separate parts of the world is striking. Humans under certain conditions develop their societies along similar paths, but within the context of their own religious and philosophical beliefs; their own social traditions and conventions; and their own economies, environments, and technologies.

There is no need, then, to lay undue stress on contacts and borrowings in describing the rise of civilizations. In this book, we treat each as a separate, independent development, though at the same time noting the evidence for contact and trade between them.

## THE REDISCOVERY OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

A century ago, a journey by boat up the Nile River took you through the heart of rural Egypt. Nineteenth-century travelers like the British writer Amelia Edwards described a kaleidoscope of village life unfolding along the banks, which they saw as little changed from the days of the pharaohs. The ruined temples and burial places of Egypt's ancient god-kings lay among modern mud-brick villages. Egyptian *fellahin* (peasants) have always known of the existence of their illustrious forbearers, just as the modern-day Maya of the Yucatán lowlands have always remembered their roots among great kingdoms of the past. In some cases, Maya communities carefully preserved oral histories and documents handed down from generation to generation, which now provide invaluable information on the remote past. Thus, in many cases, it is misleading to write of the "discovery" of the early civilizations. However, the "rediscovery" of the world's first state-organized societies over the past two centuries ranks among the greatest achievements of Western science.

Archaeologists have brought a refined and disciplined methodology to the study of ancient civilizations, which has produced often astonishingly detailed information about preindustrial states. Today's knowledge of the early civilizations results from a powerful synthesis of archaeology and data from historical and traditional sources. Thus, on many occasions, we are able to combine the data of science with actual "voices" from the remote past preserved in contemporary documents or even in oral traditions.

The beginnings of a formal discipline of archaeology began at least five centuries ago, in the hands of adventurers, antiquarians, and some remarkable pioneering scholars of ancient civilizations. For clarity, we describe the rediscovery of early civilizations in the order in which they were found.

## Classical Civilizations: Greece and Rome

Our story begins during the Renaissance, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This was when European scholars, first in Italy, and then in northern Europe, took a new interest in the writings of the classical authors of Greece and Rome. Italian architects compared Greek and Roman texts on art and architecture with the remains of surviving Roman buildings to gain a new appreciation of classical principles of construction and design. The discovery of Roman artworks such as the marble statue of the god Apollo known as the Apollo Belvedere in 1489 directly inspired Italian Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo. The interest in Greek and Roman art and literature was soon followed by an interest in the countries from which they came. Wealthy Europeans began to make their own collections of portable classical antiquities with a particular interest in Italy. In the early seventeenth century, King Charles I of England was one of the greatest of these collectors. So were the popes at Rome, whose collections of Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquities form a significant part of the holdings of the Vatican museums.

Italy was relatively accessible, and Italian rulers and noblemen were among the first excavators of Roman archaeological sites. These excavations fell well short of the standards acceptable today, and their primary aim was often the recovery of collectable objects. But some collectors did at least begin to record the provenance of artifacts such as vases in their original settings, be it a tomb or a residence, making scholars aware of the wealth of information that could be obtained from buried remains. The cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, entombed in ash since the great eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, provided some of the most spectacular results: Sculptures, bronzes, and precious metal objects were ripped from the ruins in the 1740s and 1750s on the orders of the king and queen of Naples. It was only in the 1860s that more sensitive methods were applied, and Pompeii began to yield evidence of splendid wall paintings and the gruesome plaster casts of those who died while fleeing from the ash-fall (Figure 1.2).

These early modern connoisseurs of ancient art and literature had less access to the Classical civilization of the eastern Mediterranean, since Greece remained under the control of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. Several Western European scholars and collectors nonetheless made visits to Greece, where they found many ancient buildings and monuments in a state of neglect and decay. A major turning point was the expedition of British architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in 1751–1753. They spent several months in Athens, drawing with meticulous accuracy the ruins of the great classical buildings they found there, and published the results in a handsome three-volume illustrated set on their return. Fifty years later the British diplomat Lord Elgin controversially shipped the famous frieze of the Parthenon from Athens to Britain. The "Elgin Marbles" went on display in the British Museum and remain in London to this day. The removal of Greek antiquities continued during much of the nineteenth century, though a sense of scholarly interest gradually replaced the love of collecting. By the end of the century the archaeology of classical Greece was at last put on a more secure basis by large-scale excavations, both foreign and Greek-led, at Athens, Delos, Delphi, Corinth, and Olympia.

FIGURE 1.2 Victim of falling ash at the Roman city of Pompeii in southern Italy, destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Werner Forman Archive/Getty Images.

## Egypt

Greece and Rome were in one sense accessible to Western scholars even before archaeology. Their writings—histories, literature, and plays—were in Greek and Latin, which could still be read. For other civilizations, however, access was more difficult since knowledge of both the languages and the scripts in which they had been written was lost. Decipherment, breaking the code of these forgotten writings, was a critical first step.

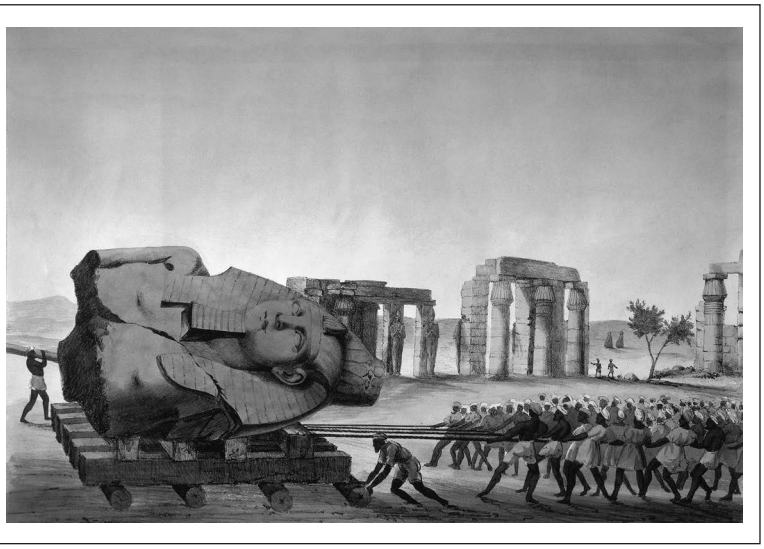
Decipherment played a transformative role in the exploration of the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia. The Greeks and Romans always considered Egypt as the cradle of human civilization. Roman tourists visited the Nile Valley, pausing to admire the Pyramids of Giza (see Box 4.1) and the temples of Thebes (Luxor). But few later travelers ventured to Egypt until the nineteenth century since it was an obscure province of the Ottoman Empire and effectively off-limits to Christians. The occasional traveler drew the pyramids or purchased powdery remains of Egyptian mummies, which were said to be a powerful medicine and aphrodisiac. Egyptian hieroglyphs and mummies caused intense interest in European scholarly circles because of the close association between the Land of the Pharaohs and the Old Testament. But it was not until Egypt assumed strategic importance during the Napoleonic Wars that Westerners finally became familiar with Egyptian civilization.

The immediate cause was the military expedition by Napoleon Bonaparte of France, who thought that control of Egypt would give him

access to Britain's possessions in India. So he invaded the Nile Delta in 1798, wresting control of Egypt from its Ottoman governor. With characteristic thoroughness, Napoleon took with him a team of 160 scientists and technicians, known as "Napoleon's Donkeys," whose job was to record the geography, culture, and archaeology of the country. The scholars fanned out over the Nile Valley with pen and pencil—collecting, recording inscriptions, and sketching. They published their results in a magnificent multivolume work, *Description de l'Egypte* (1809–1822), which caused a sensation throughout Europe, influencing art and architecture and setting off a craze for Egyptian antiquities in the Western world (Figure 1.3). The greatest discovery of all came at the hands of some soldiers building a fortification at Rosetta in the Egyptian delta. They uncovered a stone slab bearing parallel texts in Greek and in two versions of Egyptian script, which provided the key for the eventual decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs by French scholar Jean-François Champollion in 1822.

The *Description de l'Egypte* set the stage for more than a century of spectacular archaeological discoveries, culminating in the finding of the tomb of the New Kingdom pharaoh Tutankhamun by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon in 1922. Tutankhamun's tomb unleashed an epidemic of "Egyptomania," which has convulsed the world at intervals ever since. This mania takes many forms: a preoccupation with golden pharaohs, with the mystical, with the alleged properties of pyramid power and ancient Egyptian religion, or with the curses of royal mummies immortalized in successive Hollywood movies. Ancient Egypt continues to captivate the popular imagination in ways that few other civilizations can equal.

FIGURE 1.3 Among the adventurers who descended on the Nile in the early nineteenth century was Giovanni Belzoni (1778–1823), a former circus strongman, seen here transporting a head of pharaoh Ramesses II to the Nile. Hirarchivum Press/Alamy Stock Photo



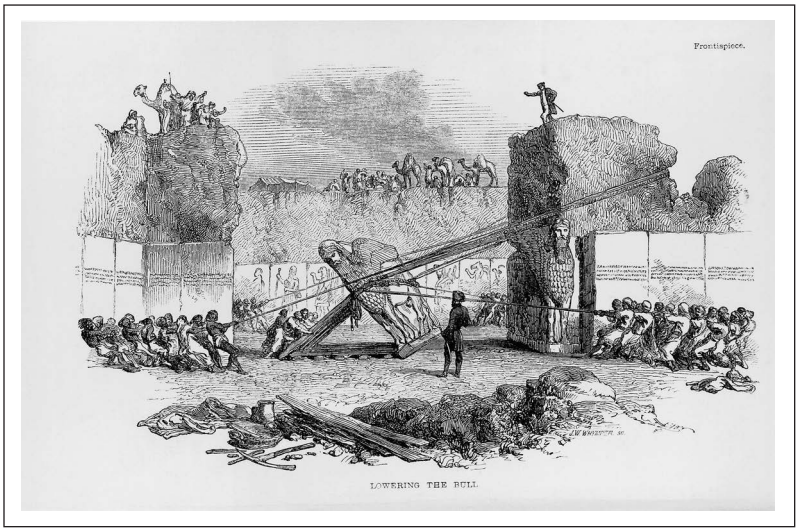
## Mesopotamian Civilizations: Assyrians and Sumerians

Among the greatest archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth century were those at Nimrud, Nineveh, and other ancient Mesopotamian cities. Until Frenchman Paul-Émile Botta and Englishman Austen Henry Layard dug into Nineveh in northern Iraq in the 1840s, however, the Assyrians of the Old Testament were only a shadowy presence on the historical stage. Layard, a young man with a taste for adventure and a hunger for fame and fortune, dreamed of romantic discoveries while standing atop the dusty mounds of Nineveh:

> *Visions of palaces underground, of gigantic monsters, of sculptured figures, and endless inscriptions, floated before me. After forming plan after plan for removing the earth, and extricating these treasures, I fancied myself wandering in a maze of chambers from which I could find no outlet. Then again, all was reburied, and I was standing on the grass-covered mound.*
>
> (Layard 1849, 111)

Layard worked first at Nimrud in 1845, and later, from 1849, at Nineveh (Figure 1.4). Meanwhile Botta had been appointed French consul to Mosul in 1840 specifically so he could dig at Nineveh, directly across the Tigris River, and acquire antiquities for the Louvre in Paris. He was also the first to unearth an Assyrian palace at nearby Khorsabad. Both men uncovered spectacular basreliefs of great kings and their courtiers, of armies marching out to conquest, of slaves laboring on great palaces, even of scenes from a royal lion hunt (already described) and the siege of Lachish in Israel, mentioned in II Kings 18:14. When a team of scholars, among them cavalry-officer-turned-linguist Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, deciphered cuneiform, the Mesopotamian script with its wedge-shaped characters, Layard could read King Sennacherib's boast before Lachish: "Sennacherib, mighty king, king of the country of Assyria,

FIGURE 1.4 Austen Henry Layard supervises the removal of a winged bull from an Assyrian palace at Nimrud in northern Iraq in 1847. DEA Picture Library/De Agostini/Getty Images

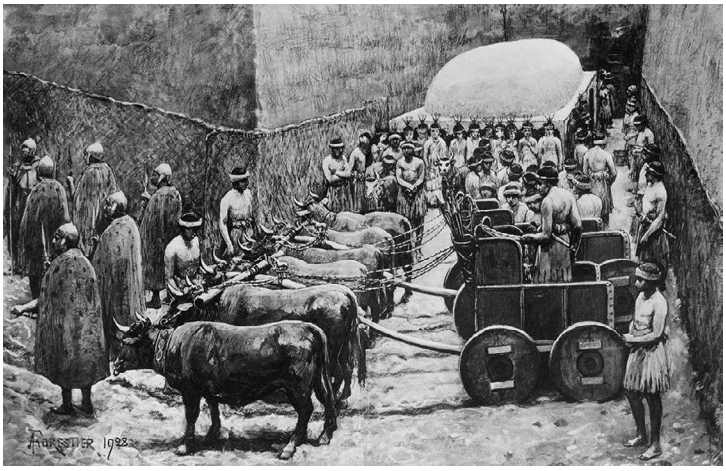


sitting on the throne of judgement, before the city of Lachish. I gave orders for its slaughter." Layard's discoveries also included the royal archives of the Assyrian monarch Assurbanipal, which were to throw light on the origins of creation legends in the first chapter of Genesis.

Although the clay tablets from Assurbanipal's library revealed the existence of a much earlier civilization in southern Mesopotamia, it was not until French diplomat Ernest de Sarzec excavated the Telloh mounds in 1877 that the existence of such an earlier urban society was confirmed. This "Sumerian" civilization, as it came to be known, did not catch the popular imagination until 1922, the year of the Tutankhamun discovery, when British archaeologist Leonard Woolley began digging at biblical Ur. His were large-scale excavations, directed by an archaeologist with a brilliant imagination and the ability to share his discoveries with a wide audience, not least because he was able to export the finest objects to museums in London and Philadelphia. In 1926, he unearthed a huge Sumerian cemetery containing sixteen "royal" tombs and thousands of commoners' graves. Working with shoe-string budgets, Woolley excavated a great death pit, where, he claimed, an entire royal court took poison and lay down to die with their mistress (though recent re-analysis of the remains suggests that their deaths to be less voluntary and more violent) (Figure 1.5). The Royal Graves at Ur caused almost as great a sensation as Tutankhamun's tomb and stimulated a new level of interest in the first city-dwellers of southern Mesopotamia.

Decades of persistent and dedicated work by archaeologists of many nationalities have assembled the rich picture of ancient Mesopotamian society that we possess today. Much still remains to be done, especially in less-well-studied areas such as Anatolia. It is salutary to reflect that the Hittites, one of the major peoples of ancient Southwest Asia, were hardly known until German excavations at Boghazköy, their capital, in 1906–1908. Subsequently,

FIGURE 1.5 Reconstruction of the "Royal Grave" of Pu-abi at Ur in southern Iraq, excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in 1922. Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.



French discoveries at Mari on the Euphrates (from 1933); Italian excavations at Ebla (from 1964); American investigations at Tell Leilan, Tell al-Raqa'i, and neighboring sites (from 1978); and British excavations at Tell Brak (1937–1938, resumed in 1976) have thrown new light on important early developments in northern Mesopotamia and Syria, away from the south Mesopotamian heartland. Such discoveries, and the promise of so much more as yet undiscovered history, make the terrible devastation and destruction that has been visited on the cultural patrimony in this region in recent years a distressing part of the human tragedy of these conflicts.

## Greece and Crete: Minoans and Mycenaeans

The late nineteenth century also saw the first exploration of the Bronze Age civilizations of Greece and Crete, at the hands of some remarkable archaeologists, such as German millionaire businessman Heinrich Schliemann:

> *I am fatigued and have an immense desire to withdraw from excavations and to pass the rest of my life quietly. I feel I cannot stand any longer this tremendous work. Besides, wherever I hitherto put the spade into the ground, I always discovered new worlds for archaeology at Troy, Mycenae, Orchomenos, Tiryns—each of them has brought to light new wonders.*
>
> (Schliemann 1885, 22)

Obsessed since childhood with Greek legend, Schliemann retired from business in his forties and devoted the rest of his life to archaeology and to proving that Homer's poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* were the literal historical truth.

Schliemann's main accomplishment lies in his excavations at the Hissarlik mound on the Dardanelles in modern Turkey, which both he and a local British resident named Frank Calvert identified as Homeric Troy. The aim was nothing less than the verification of Homeric legend, which told of a ten-year war led by the Bronze Age Greeks against the city of Troy at the mouth of the Dardanelles in modern Turkey. The story forms the background to the great epic poem the *Iliad*, written by Homer in the eighth century B.C. Schliemann and his Greek wife, Sophia, excavated Hissarlik on an enormous scale in the early 1870s and uncovered no fewer than seven superimposed cities. He claimed that a thick layer of burnt masonry and ashes, the second city from the base, was the Homeric Troy destroyed by the Greeks. At first Schliemann scarcely understood the significance of what he had found at Troy, but most people were convinced (and remain so today) that he had indeed discovered the city described in the legend.

The Greek leader identified by Homer as the leader of the expedition to Troy was Agamemnon, king of Mycenae in southern Greece. Buoyed up by his successes at Hissarlik and convinced that Agamemnon was a real historical figure, Schliemann turned his attention across the Aegean to the site of Mycenae itself in 1874. There he discovered the spectacular Shaft Graves and the skeletons of nineteen men and women adorned with opulent jewelry and other offerings, some wearing golden masks (see Figure 9.7). Schliemann proclaimed to the world that he had found Agamemnon's grave. While that identification was premature and incorrect, he had had certainly uncovered Bronze Age Mycenaean civilization.

Greek legend also told of a shadowy early civilization on Crete, associated with a king named Minos. This had to wait longer than Mycenae for its rediscovery. The principal discovery was the palace of Knossos, its remains buried beneath a great mound of debris. English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans was attracted to the site in the 1890s by carved Cretan seal-stones bearing a curious script, which he had purchased from antiquities dealers in the Athens flea market. Evans tracked down the source of these seal-stones to Knossos, and in 1900 began excavations there that were to continue at intervals for more than thirty years. He was not the first person to excavate at Knossos—a local Cretan scholar had worked there some years before—but with the greater resources available to him, he was the first to demonstrate the full significance of this important site. The palace was a confusing huddle of courtyard, staircases, storerooms, and small chambers, with residential areas and public rooms, often decorated with vivid friezes. Evans saw this as the labyrinthine residence of King Minos himself and named the civilization that it represented *Minoan*.

The Minoans traded with the Egyptians, with the Greek mainland, and with eastern Mediterranean states. From these contacts they learned of writing systems, and went on to develop their own, known as Linear A. Inscribed on clay tablets, Linear A seems to have recorded economic and administrative information, but the language used is otherwise unknown and has never been deciphered. However, Knossos yielded many more tablets in a different and slightly later script, Linear B. To his eternal regret, Arthur Evans never deciphered Linear B either. It was only in 1953, twelve years after Evans's death, that Michael Ventris announced his discovery that some of the tablets represented an early form of Greek, and unlike Linear A could thus be deciphered. The reading of the Linear B tablets has thrown considerable light on the administration of the palace of Knossos in its latter days, as well as on Mycenaean palaces on the Greek mainland, which also used the script.

## The Indus and East Asia

The archaeological discovery of early civilizations in South Asia and the Far East is the work of the twentieth century. Excavations by British and Indian archaeologists at the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in 1921 first revealed the existence of a hitherto unsuspected Bronze Age civilization in the Indus Valley of what is now Pakistan. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have remained the best-known sites, but they are now recognized to be only two among over a dozen large settlements of the Indus civilization. Unfortunately, no one has yet succeeded in deciphering the enigmatic Indus script, which appears on square seal-stones and copper plates.

The 1920s were a key period in the investigation of early Chinese civilization, too. Chinese historical records of later periods spoke of a Shang dynasty, which had ruled northern China during the second millennium B.C. Little more was known of it, however, until 1899, when a collection of cattle shoulder blades bearing an early form of Chinese script was traced to the site of Anyang in the Huanghe valley. To that extent the story of the discovery parallels that of the Minoan civilization of Crete. In the Chinese case, however, the first excavations at Anyang had to wait until 1928. Once begun, under the direction of Chinese archaeologist Li Chi, they revealed an amazing record of

wealthy royal graves and palace platforms, giving archaeological substance to the shadowy historical Shang. Work has continued at Anyang and other Shang centers up to the present day, illustrating the special character of this earliest Chinese state. Recent discoveries have also thrown light on developments in other regions of China, where distinctive regional traditions emerged in parallel with the Shang.

## The Americas: Mesoamerica

Even as Paul-Émile Botta and Austen Henry Layard labored on Assyrian cities, Boston historian William Prescott was studying ancient American civilizations. He started with the accounts of Spanish conquistadors, who were astounded by the sophistication of Aztec civilization in the Mexican highlands.

> *When we saw so many cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land and that straight and level causeway going towards Mexico [Tenochtitlán], we were amazed and said that it was like the enchantments they tell of in the legends of Aamadis, on account of the great towers<ds> . . . </ds>and buildings rising from the water, and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers even asked whether the things we saw were not a dream.*
>
> (Bernal Díaz *True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (1568) 1963, 118)

So wrote conquistador Bernal Díaz of the Spaniards' first sight of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. When Hernán Cortés and his soldiers arrived before Tenochtitlán in 1519, they were met with the sight not of an archaeological ruin but of a great preindustrial city in full vitality. Here was a Native American empire with architecture, writing, and metallurgy and with great temple-pyramids and organized systems of warfare, government, and taxation.

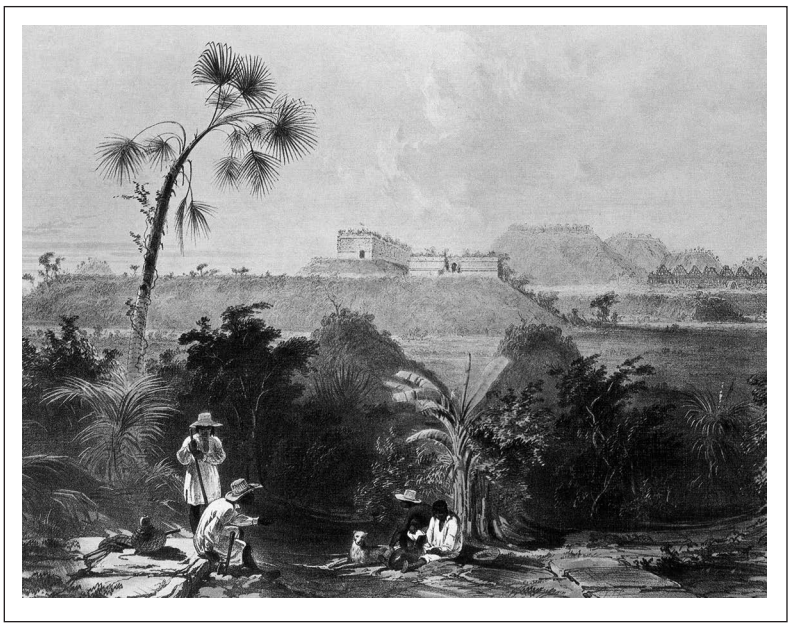
Unfortunately, Cortés and his men embarked on an orgy of destruction, which effectively banished Aztec civilization into historical oblivion. A colonial capital, Mexico City, rose on the ruins of Tenochtitlán, burying the great pre-Columbian city under urban sprawl. In the century following the fall of Tenochtitlan, a few Spanish priests gathered oral traditions and written accounts of the once-great civilization. Their researches have preserved a priceless, but alas incomplete, archive of Aztec culture for modern scholars.

The conquistadors were colonists and conquerors, people who came to the Americas to "serve God and get rich." Catholic friars destroyed Aztec cult objects and priceless written codices (illustrated documents) to obliterate all traces of "pagan" beliefs. Sympathetic study of the traditions and history of the conquered peoples was not encouraged, unless it facilitated the colonial goals of conversion to Christianity and incorporation into the Spanish regime. It was not until the nineteenth century that both American and Mexican scholars probed historical and native sources and began to write not only about the Aztecs but also about much earlier Mesoamerican civilizations. William Prescott's romanticized masterpiece *The Conquest of Mexico* (1843) became a best-seller, the first account of early Mesoamerican civilizations based on both archival and archaeological sources. That he could use archaeology at all was because of two remarkable travelers, American lawyer John Lloyd Stephens

and English artist Frederick Catherwood. Together they made two difficult journeys (1839–1840 and 1841–1842) into the jungles of lowland Mexico and Guatemala, visiting and drawing the ruins of Maya centers like Copán, Palenque, Chichen Itzá, and Uxmal. Catherwood was a brilliant artist, capable of producing pictures as accurate as photographs (Figure 1.6). Stephens was a vivid writer. Together, they published their discoveries in two disarmingly entitled volumes: *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán* (1843). These revealed the spectacular Maya civilization to an astonished world.

Over the next forty years, explorers continued to visit the region, including characters such as Augustus Le Plongeon who created spectacular photographic records of Maya art and architecture while speculating that they originated from lost civilizations. British archaeologist Sir Alfred P. Maudslay produced the first general study of Maya archaeology in four volumes between 1889 and 1902. Part of this publication was a long appendix on Maya inscriptions, with illustrations by Annie G. Hunter. Excavation and interpretation of Maya sites have been major areas of archaeological research in the century since Maudsley, but the greatest breakthrough has been made only within the last fifty years, with the decipherment of Maya glyphs. It wasn't until the 1960s that Maya script was understood to record historical events, and the pace of decipherment really accelerated in the 1980s. The texts have now forced a complete reassessment of earlier understandings of Maya rulership and political organization, as it has become possible to read accounts of fierce warfare between rulers and cities, not unlike those of Mesopotamia or, indeed, many other parts of the ancient world.

FIGURE 1.6 The Maya center at Uxmal in Mexico, painted by Frederick Catherwood in 1844. De Agostini/Getty Images.



### The Americas: Peru

The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán had been conquered a decade before, when another Spanish adventurer, Francisco Pizarro, encountered the Inka ruler Atahuallpa high in the Andes foothills in 1532. Pizarro and his small band of soldiers succeeded in capturing Atahuallpa, then held him for ransom against a roomful of gold. Although a steadfast resistance was maintained for decades by a small group of Inka nobles, the empire soon collapsed and the Spanish consolidated their rule. The Inka capital, Cusco, lay in the highlands, connected to all parts of the royal domains by a network of roads and couriers (Figure 1.7). The conquistadors stripped Cusco's temples of their gold and set out to obliterate all traces of a "pagan" civilization, just as their predecessors had done in Mexico. Only a handful of Spanish and native scholars preserved some memories of Inka civilization, but nothing like the rich material saved in Mesoamerica.

Four centuries passed before scientists explored the spectacular Inka ruins of the Andes and even earlier monuments on the arid Peruvian coast. Two names stand out in particular: German scholar Max Uhle, who first revealed the time-depth of South American civilization in his excavations at Pachacamac on the southern Peruvian coast in 1896–1897; and the more famous Indiana Jones-like figure of the American scholar Hiram Bingham. Archaeologist and historian, Bingham set off from Cusco in July 1911 in search of the "lost city of Vilcabamba," the citadel where the Inka made their last stand against the Spanish. Instead, what he visited (a mere five days later!) was the ruins

FIGURE 1.7 The capture of the Inka capital of Cusco in Peru in 1533, from an engraving published in Frankfurt in 1602. Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

of Machu Picchu, a small but spectacularly preserved Inka hilltop town (see Figure 19.11). What had saved it from destruction was its remote setting. Only 97 kilometers (60 miles) from Cusco, it had never been found by the Spanish and had never suffered destruction at their hands. It was only when a local farmer led Bingham to Machu Picchu that the stunning ruins were revealed to the wider world.

The discovery of Machu Picchu stands as one of the last pioneer explorations of the ancient civilizations. Much still remains to be discovered, however—witness the spectacular finds of recent years, among them the Bronze Age shipwreck at Uluburun off the coast of southern Turkey, which contained artifacts from nine areas of Southwest Asia (Chapter 9). And when archaeologists working at Sipán in the Lambayeque Valley of northern coastal Peru unearthed a series of gold-laden Moche warrior-priest burials in 1989, they recovered the richest unlooted tombs ever excavated in the Americas (see Box 18.1).

Discoveries like those at Sipán and Uluburun are dramatic; they make the headlines and grab the popular imagination. But less-spectacular discoveries can be just as informative, if not more so. Royal burials and richly adorned palaces illuminate the lives of kings and queens, the privileged elites who ruled different civilizations. Sometimes the most telling clues come from the commonplace to find, from an obscure ancient inscription, or from a well-preserved hut floor. It is then that we learn about the commoners, the slaves, the humble artisans who lived out their lives in quiet anonymity, in the shadow of great rulers and sometimes world-changing events. The ancient civilizations were built on the labors of thousands of faceless people who tilled the land, built temples, created artistic masterpieces, and traveled long distances in the service of the state. Their lives come down to us in silent, dispassionate artifacts and food remains; in the foundations of small dwellings; and from the fills of storage pits. With the benefit of such insights into the everyday existence of ordinary individuals, archaeology presents a more balanced view of the societies that built the Pyramids of Giza, created the great Mexican city of Teotihuacán, and laid out royal mausolea in Southeast Asia that replicated the mythic Hindu world.

## THE THREAT TO ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

Such architectural masterpieces, built by long-dead hands, are the common cultural heritage of us all. But they are constantly under threat from unscrupulous looters and industrial development, from the ravages of civil war and air pollution, and from the busy feet of package tourists. The ancient civilizations are under siege from modern society in ways that we may sometimes be powerless to control.

Tragically, much of the damage is deliberate—for example, the stripping of sites and burials of fine artworks and inscriptions by professional looters to feed the insatiable maw of the international antiquities market. As long as some wealthy individuals in the industrialized nations are prepared to pay high prices for ancient artworks without concern for provenance or legality, there will continue to be those prepared to dig into unrecorded sites, to burgle museums, and to cut away fragments of standing monuments in order to sell them. The loss to archaeology, and to world heritage in general, is incalculable.

Recent conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has also had significant impact on the archaeology of those countries. Archaeological remains are covered by the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and archaeologists are sometimes able to work with military forces to identify sites at risk and prevent or minimize damage. When law and order break down, however, the remains of the past are immediately at risk from pillage and destruction. Analysis of satellite imagery has shown increased levels of looting at archaeological sites in Egypt from 2009, at the time of the global economic crisis, and particularly after the civil disturbances associated with the Arab Spring in 2011. Some of the material found its way onto the international antiquities market. The lack of digital records or imagery of material held in many museums has made it difficult for the legitimate authorities to identify and recover items that have been stolen. The problem becomes even more acute in the case of archaeological sites where heavy machinery has sometimes been used to recover saleable objects, with no regard to the damage caused to buried buildings and structures, nor to the priceless information that can be gained from a proper study of the contexts of these discoveries. Increased looting of archaeological sites was one consequence of the recent conflict in Iraq and Syria. Sales of antiquities were used to fund insurrection, but coupled with this was the public destruction of famous archaeological sites and monuments for ideological and propaganda purposes. In 2014, for example, the forces of the so-called "Islamic State" captured the city of Mosul in northern Iraq. A few months later, video footage showed the wanton destruction of priceless Assyrian sculptures and relief carvings from the palaces at Nimrud, on the outskirts of the modern city. The desert city of Palmyra, with its elegant colonnaded main streets, suffered similar intentional damage under Islamic State control (Figure 1.8). This was not the first time in recent decades that such destruction had occurred. In 2001,

FIGURE 1.8 Damaged remains of the ancient desert city of Palmyra in Syria, recaptured from so-called Islamic State in April 2016. Xinhua/ Alamy Stock Photo.

the Taliban in Afghanistan dynamited the famous rock-cut Buddha statues at Bamiyan, considered by many to be one of the wonders of the ancient world. Such public acts of cultural destruction are testimony to the power and significance that the remains of ancient civilizations still hold today, and to their intrinsic vulnerability.

## Summary

In this chapter we have considered alternative meanings of the term *civilization* and have seen how it must be divorced from ideas of cultural progress or superiority. Early civilizations share many important features, including urbanization and state-level sociopolitical organization. Other features, such as writing and metallurgy, are common but not universal to early civilizations. The rediscovery of early civilizations has been a gradual process, beginning in the sixteenth century with the European Renaissance and the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in the New World. Discoveries such as the tomb of Tutankhamun, the Royal Graves at Ur, and the Moche Lords of Sipán kept civilizations in the headlines throughout the twentieth century, but looting and destruction cast a shadow of concern over the future fate of many of the major sites and monuments.

## Notes

1 Archaeologists conventionally use the term *Andean* to describe the culture area encompassing highland and lowland Peru and adjacent areas where civilization developed in South America. *Mesoamerica* refers to that area of highland and lowland Central America from Mexico to Guatemala where civilization developed.

1. The Early Dynastic (ED) period is itself subdivided. Early Dynastic I is dated approximately to 2900–2700 B.C., the period of the kings who reigned "before the Flood"; Early Dynastic II, 2700–2600 B.C.; and Early Dynastic III, 2600–2334 B.C.

1. *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, etc.* 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1822). *N.B:* 1818 is the date of Porter's visit to Babylon.

1. A confusing feature of Aegean Bronze Age chronology is the use of two separate systems of terminology. The first is based mainly on pottery styles and is divided simply into Early (3200–2100 B.C.), Middle (2100–1700 B.C.), and Late (1700–1050 B.C.). The mainland sequences are labeled Helladic—thus Early Helladic (EH), Middle Helladic (MH), and Late Helladic (LH); those of the Cyclades are labeled Cycladic (EC, MC, LC); and those of Crete, Minoan (EM, MM, LM).

   Alongside this system is an alternative periodization based on the Minoan palaces, beginning with the Prepalatial period (3200–2100 B.C.). This is followed by the First Palace, or Protopalatial, period (2100–1700 B.C.), corresponding to the first Cretan palaces to the period of their destruction by earthquake c. 1700 B.C. Then follows the Second Palace, or Neopalatial, period (1700–1450 B.C.), which ends with the destruction of the Cretan palaces and the beginnings of Mycenaean control at Knossos. The Third Palace period runs from 1450 B.C. to the fall of the mainland Mycenaean palaces in 1200 B.C. The final phase in this system is the Postpalatial period, from 1200 to 1050 B.C.

2. The conventional classification scheme, based on vessel forms and decoration, is as follows: Middle Minoan IA, IB, IIA, IIB, IIIA, IIIB; Late Minoan IA, IB, II, IIIA1, IIIA2, IIIB, IIIC.

3. Mycenaean pottery classifications are complex. In pottery terms the

Mycenaean civilization comes under the Late Helladic (LH) Period, to distinguish it from the Late Minoan (LM) of Crete and the Late Cycladic (LC) of the islands. Late Helladic is subdivided into three major units (LH I, II, and III), and these again into smaller divisions (LH IIA, IIB; LH IIIA1, IIIA2, IIIB1, IIIB2; IIIC; with regional and site-specific subdivisions) from the evidence of pottery shapes and decorations. There is a large literature on the subject, and these pottery styles are generally taken to represent successive time periods of around fifty years, though some (e.g., LH IIIB2) are not present in all areas.

1. There are a number of conflicting schemes for Etruscan chronology. The one used here broadly shadows the customary scheme for classical Greece, a situation that reflects the fact that the dates of the Etruscan phases are based largely on imports of Greek painted pottery and Southwest Asian artifacts.
2. We have chosen to use the term *Archaic* to cover the whole of this period, though some authorities divide it into two, *Orientalizing* (750–600 B.C.) and *Archaic* (600–480 B.C.), while others consider the terms *Orientalizing*, *Archaic*, and *Classical* judgmental and propose that they be abandoned.

1. Eighty Roman miles equals 117 kilometers (73 twenty-first century [statute] miles).

1. Lionel Casson, trans., *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 63, 87, 91.

1 The general terminological framework for Andean archaeology varies among researchers. We have adopted what appears to be the most commonly used today, preferring the term Preceramic to Archaic.

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